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Studying Men in Africa Critically

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How vital is it to study men? My purpose in this study is to show that it is as essential to investigate a Mopedi or Sudanese man (as instances) as one of the Bapedi ethnic group or the Sudanese nation as it is to look at them as *men* of the Bapedi and *men* in Sudan. It is equally important to study a man as a part of the group called men as is to study them as ethnic or national subjects.

Then again, perhaps one ought to pose the question directly: whether there is anything of consequence that gets lost from studying men *indirectly*. I mean by this, whether there is something of significance we miss if we adopt a lens that, for instance, places *women* at the centre in studying men, as feminist studies have done for long. I shall maintain that we do indeed tend to mis-appreciate some of the true forms and functions of psychic structures, the world of labour and capital, cultural forms and political landscape if we do not examine closely the deployment of masculinity in the structuring of psyches, in employment and money-making, in culture and politics.

It is important to stress that what I suspect is an ever-present possibility of mis-appreciation, not malevolence; I see the project of studying men as related to and supportive of radical gender transformation, at least in Africa. For anyone concerned with injustice around the world, a study of men cannot be underlined by the project of subverting male power, of reworking hegemonic masculinities and gendered superiority. In such a world as we have, authenticating manhood or finding the lost key to being a true male cannot be the driving purpose of our investigation of masculinity. Even as I seek to show the gain of investigating men as subject to gender power as much as they are of ethnic or linguistic power, race or national ideology, culture or class, I am at once going to allow myself to wonder whether it is best to do so by putting our energies towards

building a discipline around a men's discipline that will be the dedicated vehicle for this task, or whether it will suffice to examine men as a unit of analysis, infusing masculinity within, for example, social and developmental psychology, economics, cultural studies, politics.

In this chapter, I draw a simple sketch, depicting researches and other interventions on men and their development around the continent. My intention is to work from this towards showing reasons that support further efforts to study men in Africa. Finally, I indicate what form I believe such studies ought to take and why.

I will begin by making a distinction of some import around orientation towards men. I then present and analyse a case of a letter to a newspaper. The letter is used to ground subsequent arguments about the form and contexts of our approaches in investigating men: approaches which, for the sake of argument, are here distinguished into two broad lines. I then go on to show that what the letter-writer (and indirectly, in his reception to the letter, the newspaper's editor) is intent on is buttressing or recuperating a particular form of masculinity, an *instance* of masculinity as this form of masculinity must not be regarded as the only masculinity in town, even though the masculinity being argued for by the letter is indeed the main masculinity. The point made in this section is that not to pay attention to insignificant matters within the idea of masculinity and a man contained in that letter is to continue in the direction of a massive submerged iceberg in the dark. The struggles for a just gender order requires pointing out why some work around men and boys needs to be viewed and brought even closer together rather than parallel to or away from struggles for women's liberation around the world, around the continent, and in local settings.

An Upsurge of Research

At the start one ought to take note of the fact that as a disciplinary formation, what I shall for my purposes call men's studies or critical studies of men, is non-existent on the continent. Nevertheless, it needs pointing out that there has in recent times been an upsurge of empirical studies, courses, conferences, symposia and institutes about men and masculinities. With this is meant that while critical studies of men or men's studies as a coherent body of knowledge, and activities constituted by practitioners, journals, dedicated professional associations or divisions within associations, departments or programmes, and students or a combination of these constituents does not exist, there are some students and teachers, there are departments of gender studies or others who offer modules or parts of modules on masculinities, and special editions of journals and books on the topic have been published (see *Agenda* 1998; *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1998; Dunbar Moodie with Ndatshe 1994; Luyt and Foster 2001; Morrell 2001; Reid and Walker 2004; Ouzgane and Morrell 2005).

On the other hand, there is great unevenness in the development of thinking, research and teaching about men's practices and lives from one country to another. Some countries exhibit certain of these aspects of disciplinary establishment while others still have to make a start. In general, however, developments around studies of men in Africa are still, in comparison to developments in Australia, parts of Europe and North America, at an early stage.

From Sympathy to Critical Engagement with Men

In any talk of studying men, there is a crucial differentiation to be made. This I have already suggested above in reference to men's studies *or* critical studies of men *or* masculinities. These names actually bear different meanings. And herein lies the beam on which male agony, or male leadership or other skills, or male ways of doing things, or any possible discussion of aspects of males' lives is balanced; it is a beam that separates groups of observers of male behaviour from each other.

One group of observers looks at male behaviour and says, for example, events and phenomena such as the Industrial Revolution, anti-colonial wars and the emancipation of women have caused grief and confusion in men's lives. These material and psychosocial assaults have 'stiffed' males. Boy-children, young males who would be husbands, fathers and men on the shop floor, most of us are confused if not terrified about the changes these historic events have brought into our lives. For a long time, but much more so in the last few decades, there are very few individual males who are still certain about what their roles and place in society are. Only a handful of males can say with confidence who they are and what they can and cannot do in their relations to women, children and other males. The result of this has been confusion, even a loss of true manhood. This lost masculinity, this puzzlement about what men really are, which tends to erupt in different forms of negative acts, is what needs diagnosing and fixing.

War has its less enjoyable sides, and Africa has not had a great time in symbolic and physical wars waged on its people by European imperialists, home-grown dictators, army generals and capitalists. This is what the second broad group of observers might say. In war people lose their lives, actually or psychologically. It is true then that individuals and groups of males might and do experience suffering from wars as from the vagaries of capital, the residues of imperial domination, racism and ethnocentrism. However, on the whole, it tends to be males who wage war on other males and everybody else; it is men who hold social and political power in most societies. Indeed, there have been no female dictators or coup leaders in Africa. Hence, this second group of thinkers would argue, forms of masculinity and gendered social and political relations that encourage war are what need engaging with and transforming.

There is another reason why we need to mark out men's studies from the critical variety of studies of men and masculinities. That reason is that there has in fact been much debate about what to call this field that studies men. Some writers opt for men's studies while others think this is an unsuitable name (Hearn and Lattu 2002). The important distinction is therefore one of *orientation*. It is a distinction of groups of observers in terms of how they *perceive what men do*, whether they are naively sympathetic or just critical. A simple example might make this clear.

Say a teenage girl gets pregnant by an older married man who for one reason or another does not own up. The teenager begets a boy. Alone and as best as she can, she raises him. The boy grows up to be a strong man. At 40-something, now a happily married and successful businessman, he in turn gets a young woman pregnant. For reasons different from his unknown father's he also is unable to own up. How might different observers of men's practices understand this scenario?

The first group of observers would approach the 40-something man, and perhaps his father, as harbouring the pain that most men in post-colonial capitalist societies carry around with them. It is this male pain that makes older men chat up teenage females for sex. It is this hurt, which most men will recognize but rarely admit to, that leads them not to use condoms when they have casual sex. It is this unacknowledged and deep suffering that lies behind men not taking responsibility for their 'illegitimate' children. These observers therefore tend to look for reasons why an older man would like casual, condomless sex with a younger woman but not be too happy to play father were she to fall pregnant and say the pain is what post-colonialism and capitalism do to good men.

Another group of observers might say, look at that teenage mother who raised the boy who became the 40-something, happily married, successful businessman: she was the first to get a raw deal. They might say, let us examine the conditions that would force a teenage girl to want to have unprotected sex with an older man. They might say, these conditions are probably the same ones that allow older men to bend young women's will to having unprotected sex with them as well as manage to abandon their part in raising the offspring of this coupling, conditions that include laws, culture and economy. These observers might argue that there seems to be a power that the young females do not seem to have and the men do. They might also point out that this gender power, as other forms of power tend to be, is entwined in the example with age-power and perhaps money-power. Therefore, in this approach what are sought are the circumstances that render it possible for men to leave, and for women to be left carrying the baby.

Motivators, preachers, programme leaders, scholars and writers who work from a position we have referred to as men's studies, or perhaps more appropri-

ately men's consciousness thought, tend to walk the first way outlined above. This group sees its work as analogous to and a response to the establishment of feminist thought and women's liberation, as the poet Robert Bly has averred. In the preface to his popular book *Iron John*, Bly said:

I want to make clear that this book does not seek to turn men against women, nor to return men to the domineering mode that has led to repression of women and their values for centuries. The thought in this book does not constitute a challenge to the women's movement. The two movements are related to each other, but each moves on a separate timetable. *The grief in men has been increasing steadily* since the start of the Industrial Revolution and *the grief has reached a depth that cannot be ignored.* (1990: x, emphasis original)

Where Bly spoke of meek men who need to get iron into their bellies and psyches, someone like Théun Mares (1999), who follows Bly in using the myth of a lost or hidden key, perceives the problem of masculinity as one of a world gone haywire; of men and women not knowing their rightful places. In this world women act like men, and men, like the one in our example, have turned into juveniles who actually want but resent being mothered. That is where it all starts. The problem with society is that men are no longer true to their male stuff and that women reign.

This is exactly what has happened in the world today. Because men have been acting helpless, the mother in females has taken over, and to such an extent that the world is being dominated by women who are becoming ever more aggressive, as men are becoming ever more weak and self-indulgent. (Mares 1999: 51)

The aim of men's consciousness thought is to give men something along the lines of what 'Women's Studies' gave to women: self-knowledge. Men's consciousness thought puts men at the centre, just like women's liberation struggle put women at the forefront.

For our purposes here, this is what might be named *sympathetic* men's studies. It ought to be admitted that talking this way about men and women does pull in the crowds. It seems that when one says the problem is boys need fathers, women need to submit to husbands to right the order of things, and males must stand like real men, there are more men and women who are going to be listening. More than the other sort of studies of men, sympathetic men's studies have been successful in spilling out of journal pages, symposia and lecture halls into popular knowledge, women and men's magazines, church gatherings and men's groups. Leading figures, though they may not work as scholars themselves, who are associable with men's consciousness thinking, or at least work from a view of men's anguish or a loss of true manhood as central to the enmeshed problematics

of gendered relations and men's lives, include Bly, James Dobson, Théun Mares and Steve Biddulph. Many more books, articles and other media are produced from within a men's consciousness thought-influenced orientation than there are from what we have identified as the second strand of studying men.

This second course in studying men is followed by scholars who prefer to talk of *critical* studies of men and masculinities. Where the idea of men as under attack from gender stuff or confused about what they need to be or in pain from absent fathers has received considerable attention in the media, business boot-camps and government, the critical tendencies continue to battle against dominant forms of social, economic and political life. They also battle about showing that in spite of the apparent attack on straight men, the identity diffusion and the depression caused by being born male, men as a group still control society. Some of the writers in this area include the Australian Robert Connell, the Finland-based British scholar Jeff Hearn, the South African Robert Morrell and Michael Kimmel from the USA. These and other scholars working from this orientation are not likely to be discomfited by being referred to as feminist, and all of them will have little trouble with the label pro-feminist. As such, their body of work might also be filed under pro-feminist studies. Researchers in Critical Studies of Men tend to be familiar with feminist theory and research and get inspiration from, to use that old but more appropriate term, women's liberation struggles. Some of them tend to work side by side with feminist teachers in Gender Departments and Women's Studies Programmes.

What I want to do next is to give another example and analyse it to show one version of masculinity. In this way, I want to further animate the distinction I have made between the two streams in understanding men. This example also grounds my comments on why there has not been a great deal of development around studying men and masculinities in Africa, be it from sympathetic perspective or critical vantage point, as well as towards arguing why heroic efforts are necessary to develop this field in Africa.

Money for Your Winning Points

The *Daily Sun* of Friday 7 January 2005 carried a letter signed by Thembinkosika-Mthwana, Dobsonville, Soweto. The name indicates a writer of Nguni ancestry. The tabloid at that time held the distinction of being the newest and the highest-selling South African newspaper. It remains the biggest seller. Ka-Mthwana's letter was entitled, 'What is happening to South Africa?', a rephrasing by one of the paper's editorial team of a line from the published letter.

The letter itself is printed with accompanying large white lettering on a red-box background, with the heading: 'This letter of the day wins R100. WELL DONE!' Then, in bold letters at the bottom of the letter, the editor writes: 'You

certainly have raised some interesting points. What do other *Daily Sun* readers think? In the meantime, please accept R100 for the winning letter of the day.’

Here is the first reason why this letter is worth some of our time. For a letter to win a prize, however meagre, alerts us to the fact that this letter contains winning views about, in this case, manhood, the gender order and the general social structure in South Africa in 2005. For a poor man, or woman, in a post-apartheid neo-liberal country with a very high unemployment level to read that *this* letter has won a hundred rand could motivate him or her to see whether its winning formulations might be replicated, especially given that the editor is encouraging the escalation of its contents. For all who read this letter, whether they agree or not with its positions, it could also have crossed their mind that manhood, the gender order and South African social structure may or may not be in need of fixing as the editor appears to suggest, but the editor clearly thinks the readers of the *Daily Sun* may be interested to contemplate the subject.

Alternatively, in that letter is drawn a society that critical readers of the tabloid cannot but seek to challenge. However, it is of course possible that the editor may be drawing us out. Let us play along then. If we do, we are led to the second reason for the noteworthiness of the letter: what it says. Let us consider its views and assumptions about its objects. In other words, what views or penmanship won Ka-Mthwana that R100? In view of its brevity, 131 words in all, let me quote the letter in full.

Oh my lawless country! Allow me to express my views on my beloved country, South Africa. This country is lawless. Other countries enforce their laws whether the community is for or against them. In other countries everything is in order. The community knows what one may or may not do. If you do something wrong, you will bear responsibility. Why is it not so in my country? Or is this democracy, the ruler of my beloved country, right or wrong?

- Abortion is legalized.
- Gay marriage is legalized.
- Children are allowed to lay charges against their parents.
- Men no longer rule over their families.

What is up with this beautiful country of mine? It is getting totally out of the hand of God? Please God, save South Africa.

One Man’s Masculinity and Another’s Pain

Evidence exists that there is more than just one letter-writer and possibly more than one editor who share the view that South Africa is a country in trouble. It is not uncommon to hear callers to radio and television talk-shows articulating feelings

and thoughts congruent with those of the writer of the letter. Studies have also shown how democracy is something that still has to infect homes and hearts, that it needs to be made practical in daily existence and not simply a right on the Bill of Rights (see Abrahams, Jewkes and Laubsher 1999). You would therefore not be too far-off if you believed this is a society where the gender order has completely broken down. From this perspective, public and private life, families and cultures, are all in a mess. As Ka-Mthwana puts it, this putative disarray derives from the fact that unlike in other countries in South Africa, termination of pregnancy – specifically, of certain categories of pregnancies and before a certain time – is now permitted, same-sex marriage may soon become a reality (it is not yet law), abused children are encouraged by activists, schools and the police to report such abuse even if it is their fathers who abuse them, and 33 per cent of households, as at 2001, have females as heads and the source of the largest income in the home (Statistics South Africa 2002).

At this point, it becomes crucial to emphasize that the letter expresses *a specific form* of masculinity. What Ka-Mthwana is assuming to be how men are in South Africa is in fact *not* the only masculinity in that country. In fact, there are men who are pro-choice and believe that women have a right to their own bodies; males who have sex with other males and may want to marry each other; normal grown men who do not long to rule over a family, do not wish to reproduce, and believe that children have rights; there are men, as there are women, who do not believe in God but in Allah, Yahweh or Jah; and there are others who are atheist. Having said that, it is vital to recognize that a heterosexual patriarchal capitalist masculinity is the hegemonic form of masculinity in South Africa.

Contradictory to its presumption of a single masculinity, one cannot miss a sense of nostalgia in the letter for an era that is melting away when all men were powerful and straight. In other words, even while he posits one true masculinity there is melancholia in the man's words about a bygone putative era and place when the fact of one masculinity in town was incontestable. Psychoanalysis would speak about disavowal here, that the letter-writer holds two incompatible beliefs at the same time: one where men have always ruled over women, which would fit in with Ka-Mthwana's wish, and another, which fits in reality, where there are homosexual men and women have a right to their bodies.

In spite of all the worrying and contradictions in his letter, more of the house that male power built remains intact and very well looked after than Ka-Mthwana allows. By this I mean masculine domination has built a house, or if you will a world, which suits itself and which can perpetuate itself. This dominant masculinity that the letter highlights, in other words, is trussed to a certain architecture of society and the world. In this account of life between males and females and the world in which they interact, 'the male is the one who, firstly, provides the lead; secondly, points out the direction; thirdly, prescribes the method to be employed'

(Mares 1999: 58). From within this world, the letter-writer, (like the last author), tries to bring to our attention, and strings together, a number of related elements, central among which is a certain way to be a man and which if threatened will endanger the world itself. Both speakers claim true manhood is heteromascularity, true manhood is revered, for it is only true men who can rule, and all of this is because true manhood is, the suggestion goes, decreed by a certain spirit; and hence, in this view, the social order is near collapse because a great gender and sexual upheaval is under way.

There is evidence of confusion, even pain and despair, in what Thembinkosika-Mthwana is saying. This must not be derided out of hand. Reasons why some men in South Africa might be experiencing bewilderment, distress and dependency are not in short supply. Some of them are objective, others intra-individual. Similar social facts and personal pains that trouble males are evident in other parts of the continent and the world. With respect to the USA, in an interview by George Myers on why the story of Iron John found such fertile ground among contemporary North American men, Bly's answer was that it had to do with different kinds and moments of psychic abandonment that have impacted on male lives and identities that society did not take care to repair. He said, given this state of affairs, men had to get together with other men to repair to the wilds, as it were, learn to be their own fathers, and with the help of the old stories, find the key that would lead them from being boys to men:

I was thinking this weekend, after doing a couple of days [speaking at a conference] for men out in Colorado, that men have had three abandonments. From the time after the Industrial Revolution, men have felt abandoned by their fathers and that abandonment is quite real. Then they are abandoned by their grandfathers, because their grandfathers have gone to Phoenix, or they're just plain gone and there's no one to tell the younger men stories, and so on. To some extent, men also have been abandoned by women. You can feel that men have depended on women to initiate them or help them in some way. So in a certain way, men have been abandoned by women in the last 34 years. I don't think that's a bad thing because the women have been doing a lot of caretaking – more than they ought to have been doing. Nevertheless, those three abandonments float around in the men's psyche and they're not quite recognized. So what all that really means is that, to move from boy to man, you're not going to get help from the father, you're not going to get it from your grandfather, and you're not going to get it from the women. Therefore, where do you get it? Well, you're going to have to get it from other men, but the knowledge is not stored in the other men. The knowledge is stored in the stories. Two things happen by getting at the knowledge in this way. We go back to the stories that have stood the test of time and, by getting together, men are

able to help themselves, to be each other's fathers and grandfathers. (Myers 1992)

Returning to South Africa, the last fifteen years have seen the country undergo tremendous political, economic and social changes. Surely, these shifts must have an impact on how males and females see themselves and each other. Surely, the fact that white masculine political power has been challenged by ideas of racial and gender democracy has implications on how white men see themselves, women and other men. Surely, the new constitutional order must mean that the old way of exercising power, the brute power that prevailed apartheid, needed to find a new subtle way of expressing itself. And surely, the Bill of Rights and other laws and policies that set out the principles of non-sexism, gender justice and equity challenge masculinities fundamentally. All this cannot be overlooked in reading Ka-Mthwana's letter and the newspaper approbation.

That is not all. Globalization has also had an equally confusing effect on social and economic relations, as well as specifically gendered life and masculinities; an effect that is at times felicitous but at others has been devastating. For example, the continuing changing fortunes of the South African currency and the rise of interest rates early in the new century have had untoward effect, especially on the poor. The country has seen a fall in employment in low-skill sectors, including mining and manufacturing, leaving many a man without a job. Where men derived their sense of worth and identity from earning a salary, paying for children to go to school and having women look after the house, the loss of employment and daily spectre of unmet needs would have a serious effect on these men's masculinity.

There is, however, a sense in which the sentiments in the letter, as much as Bly's and Mares's work, are as unsafe as going to a shebeen (a place of drinking in a township) carrying a homemade gun. If firearms are responsible for a lot of deaths in South Africa and so need to be regulated much more stringently, firearms clumsily made at home are just murder/suicide walking the streets, meaning they have a tendency to backfire or go off when simply being stroked. To carry such an unreliable weapon to an illegal drinking rendezvous makes it multiply unsafe. More than just the intended target might get hurt.

The relevance of this image to masculinity, gender and society is that you cannot go around with half-baked, ahistorical, dangerous ideas about men, women and children whose intention is simply to blame others (women, children, LGBTIQI [lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered, queers and intersexed]), for whatever pain or sense of powerlessness men are experiencing. Is this not like blaming women for being raped, children for being abused, queers etc. for being discriminated against?

However, about the social order being challenged, and of there being under way attempts to change the gender and sexual regimes, there is no disagreement. It is true that there is a change, at times stressful, occurring in South African

society. Yet, in a country where there were tens of thousands of reported cases of rape each year for the last few years and a long history of persecution of gays and state-sanctioned disrespect of the 'rights of others', it cannot be women and girls and anyone else except heterosexual males who cause this distress. How can it be those who were legally historically oppressed (who still mostly informally continue to be marginalized) who are responsible for the disorientation experienced by 'once warrior heterosexual men'?

It is true that when one realizes that those who argue this position are indeed serious, one might get stumped. Yet, again, if it *is* true that straight males are experiencing uncertainty and pain for no longer being in power or being truly men because of local and global changes, why, I would ask, would their grief and confusion be more than that of others, more than of queers, the poor and women? Indeed, then, what this seems to suggest is that men as a group, alongside the poor, women and homosexuals, should engage the state to step up its effort of protecting and legitimating those who were not given protection and beyond the pale before the advent of new constitutional order, without denigrating the rights of heterosexual men.

Contrary to the letter-writer's claim, therefore, South Africa is not lawless because good men are under attack. Rather, whatever lawlessness is perceived or actually evident is because violence against women and children, for a long while at astronomical levels, was not regarded as a social problem but at best individualized. Having historically believed that respect is theirs by natural right and that they did not have to earn it, men are the group that has tended to resort to and escalate violence both against each other and against children, in addition to sexual violence to restore the 'law'. Social disorder is not a consequence of the fact that homosexuals can marry (this is not true, yet) or that women can now decide about their bodies with constitutional protection, and that only prayer can help bring gays and females under control, but rather that the practices of men and gender relations, despite changes in the legal and constitutional order, have generally refused to change that much. Whatever pain and confusion a man such as Ka-Mthwana may be experiencing then, there is an equal, if not more, of a case to be made for working for the transformation of masculinities and relations between African men and women.

The Gender Iceberg

Given the troubles Africa faces, such as the government-sponsored, ethnic-motivated destruction of Darfur, deepening poverty throughout the continent, the crisis that erupted in Togo and the mind-numbing rates of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, it is perhaps hard to think of much else than trying to deal with these problems. There seems to be little time to give thought to an insignificant, ranting, letter-writing man. However, to overlook the writing would be an error.

For one, I would argue that such ideas as contained in the letter inform the daily lives of some men and women and underpin this troubling picture of the continent. Such 'winning' assumptions about gender, masculinity and sexuality, and relations between adults and children as read in the newspaper are the submerged iceberg whose visible tip is of cultural and political intolerance, state violence, sponsored inter-ethnic hatred, widening inequalities and deepening poverty, different national crises around the continent and the rates of HIV/AIDS.

Women's and Men's Intersecting Struggles

Given the foregoing, it needs to be made known that there are many organizations and individuals in Africa whose work seeks to show that doing good towards children, females and homosexual citizens, and generally towards those on the margins of or outside society, is what a society should do. Some of these individuals and organizations have recently held dialogues on and been rewarded for showing the genderedness of different aspects of society, economics, politics and culture that would take up all the space given for this chapter. I should still like to mention a few:

1. A conference held at Fort Hare in July 2004, aimed at providing a range of stakeholders with an opportunity to exchange information on gender equality in health;
2. Two conferences, one on Gender and Visuality in August 2004, hosted by University of Western Cape History Department and Women & Gender Studies, and the other, Writing African Women, at the same university;
3. 2005 CODESRIA annual Gender Institute, with Masculinities as theme for the year;
4. The second Sexuality Leadership Development Fellowship, held by the Lagos-based African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre hosting fellows from Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria on Sexuality and Masculinity, its chosen topic for the congress;
5. Perhaps there is no better signpost of the advances and encouragement for the continuance of gender equity and transformation work than the efforts of Wangari Maathai who was awarded the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for leading the Green Belt Movement. The singularity of the award was not only for being given to the first African woman; it was also in highlighting the importance of seeing the interwoven nature of environmental concerns, peace and gender struggles. On receiving the prize, and after noting to Marika Griehsel on behalf of the Nobel Foundation website that it is not incidental to power and struggles around it that it is men who have power, Maathai also said:

I'm quite sure that, with this kind of a prize, a lot of prejudices against women are automatically removed. I can say without exaggeration that everybody in this country (Kenya), and I'm sure many people in Africa, are extremely happy and are associating themselves with the prize – both men and women. And I'm sure that, at such a time, men appreciate the role that women can play. I know that, for many men in this country, they're very proud. And they associate themselves with what the women have been doing. And this is something that I had already seen in the work that many men associate themselves with. So, I think that, at a certain level, when women are dealing too with real issues, and when those issues are recognized, that there is no longer the gender bias, and that both men and the women converge in their appreciation.

Side by side with these struggles around women's gendered lives, there has also been a build-up of work around men and boys. These efforts are focused on critiquing ideas such as those contained in the letter we have examined. More generally, these men's intellectual and material struggles have posed questions on the production of masculinities as well as working on how males can be mobilized into working towards *gender and sexual justice*, and not simply being warriors. For example, in 1997 scholars gathered in Durban, South Africa, to talk about masculinities. Since then there have been three other conferences on the same theme: one hosted by the Gender Education and Training Network, a non-governmental organization based in Cape Town, in 2003, another at Wits University in 2004 in Braamfontein, and the third at Western Cape University in 2005.

Along with these opportunities to share critical work around men, there has also been developing a body of research and programmes on masculinities. In a context where sexual and gender-based rights still raise the hackles of editors and letter-writers, it seems crucial to make note of these advances. Rather than merely pointing to them, of even greater import is to stress the importance of how work on masculinities cannot but show the centrality of gendered and sexual politics and practices.

But Why Men?

The last point brings us back to the question of why study men. I have suggested that the emergence of research, activist work and programmes around masculinities in some parts of Africa follows the trend around the world. From different areas, some of that attention has been focused on what has been called a crisis of masculinities. The nature of the crisis has not always been made clear, though. Some men's movements and scholars within men's consciousness thought have argued for restoring traditional values of manhood. Other scholars such as those in critical studies of men and masculinities have posited a different view. There

are thus varying motivations for the engagement with men's genders. Nevertheless, there does appear to be some consensus that there is a problematic that has to do with being a man. And the problematization of manhood is visible in several spheres, from activism to the state and scholarship. In scholarship, the attention can be seen across many disciplines, from African studies to theology and history, and straddling concerns from the HIV/AIDS epidemic to sociological, psychological and historical themes.

Men, Situations and Flux

It is scholars within the broad tradition of critical studies who have noted (again, elaborating a point made by feminist epistemologists and methodologists) that masculinities and men have never been absent from academic writing, as they have not been from the centre of economy, culture and politics. Again, following feministic critiques, these scholars have pointed out that academics have traditionally had a habit of presenting the world from a male perspective. Male power has always been embedded in political hierarchies, social order and family structures, as they have been in intellectual work.

How the current interest is different from what men have been doing for a long time is in its focus on men *as a gender*, '*not-one*', *situated* and *ever-changing*. In addition to differentiating between the sexes, one of the key insights from critical studies on men is that each gender is *internally* differentiated and unfixed. To get back to where we started and use an example: critical scholars of men's lives would say there is some value in investigating a man of the Bapedi ethnic group or one from Sudan as equally or firstly a *man*, as part of a group called men, which is distinguishable from women, just as it is to study Bapedi or Sudanese with the analytical lens of ethnicity or nationalism. Such scholarship would go on to say that a Bapedi man's manly practices are unlike say, a Sudanese man's gendered behaviours and ideologies. They would also maintain that in studying a Bapedi or Sudanese masculinity living in the twenty-first century, there is a good probability of soon finding out that such an object is different from what it was in the nineteenth century.

In summary then, critical studies on men and masculinities seek to distinguish themselves by putting a specific rather than an implicit focus on men and masculinities; taking into account feminist, gay and critical gender scholarship; showing recognition of men and masculinities as explicitly gendered; indicating an understanding of men and masculinities as socially produced; seeing men and masculinities as differing from context to context such as Europe to Africa, country to country, one period to another; stressing men's and masculinities' relations to gender power; by spanning both the material and the discursive in analyses; and interrogating the intersection of gender and other social divisions such as race,

class and rural/urban in the making of men and masculinities (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005: 3).

It may be that the horse has bolted the stable, but I think work around men and masculinities in Africa can be conducted quite comfortably in old disciplines such as law, anthropology, economics, politics and psychology and others like African Studies, business and management studies, and cultural studies; and in fact, that this is the preferred route to pursue. At best, I think owing to the tradition in which critical scholars of masculinities and men's lives position themselves, such work can, and ought to take its place alongside feminist or women and gender studies. While there may in the future arise debates about whether or not to have local or regional associations or departments, what one might say with confidence is that scholars and teachers around the continent who would study men can do little harm in their researches and classes by engaging in an approach that seeks to point out that it was not simply *African* people who were oppressed under colonial rule, but instead that it was Africans as *at the same time* subjects of *gender* and *sexual orders*; that there is a relation between African men and African women that fails to be fully comprehended if it is not *also* referred back to *gender power*; that African masculinities and men do not grow naturally from the ground, so to say, but are *produced in relationship* between people, and between individuals and structures; and that there are *differences* between men, over *time*, over *villages and national borders*, and because of their divergent desires, biographies and life developments.

What all of this simply seems to point to is that any analysis of political or economic disadvantage gains immeasurably from a focusing on sexual and gender practices/subjectivities of males, history, power and context. The advantage in politicizing and historicizing men's practices/subjectivities, in looking closely at the doing of masculinity, is realizing their tenuous hold on and struggles around the demands to be 'the' man. But it has been clear to anyone who is interested that, for example, there have always been rich old gay men who are in a different position from rich old heterosexual men, and violent straight white urbanites in contrast to pacifist bisexual Muslim villagers. The politics and psychologies of men's gender thus reveal the instability of masculinities, the idea of there being vital distinctions among men. In other words, when society is looked at through the view of men as transgendered, bisexual, straight or HIV-positive subjects, in addition to being poor/rich, African/American, it is enabled to understand that masculinity changes with circumstance, history and culture, that in fact one can only talk about several masculinities within a society. Politicizing masculinities offers society a way to see that, at any point in time, there is no single idea of how to be a man. Knowing that there are dominant masculinities, and alternative and subordinate ones, a challenge can then be mounted.

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